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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SKOPJE 000456

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SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: PM GRUEVSKI SURVIVES NO CONFIDENCE
VOTE, COALITION HOLDS

REF: SKOPJE 418

Classified By: P/E CHIEF SHUBLER, REASONS 1.4(B) & (D).

SUMMARY

11. (C) The government survived a no-confidence vote June 7 tabled by the opposition SDSM party to protest PM Gruevski's alleged feuding with coalition partners and "failure to advance judicial reforms." While the high-stakes no-confidence gamble was playing out, Gruevski also faced the threat of a walkout by his junior coalition partner, eAlbanian DPA VP Thaci, over the latter's insistence that the GOM delay implementation of a May 29 deal with rival eAlbanian party DUI. Strong international pressure on Thaci resulted in the DPA leader's backing down on his threat, and in a government announcement that the coalition would remain intact to pursue NATO reforms. If Gruevski hopes to make real progress on the country's NATO candidacy, he will have to adjust his leadership style to enhance communication and coordination, both with his coalition partners as well as with key opposition leaders. End summary.

GOVERNMENT SURVIVES NO-CONFIDENCE VOTE

12. (C) PM Gruevski's inter-ethnic (VMRO-DPMNE/DPA/NSDP) governing coalition survived a vote of no-confidence tabled by opposition SDSM on June 7. Of 117 MPs present, 65 voted against the motion, and 43 voted for it. There were no abstentions, but nine MPs reportedly did not vote. Had the motion carried, the government would have been obliged under the Constitution to submit its resignation. The opposition cannot propose another vote of no-confidence for 90 days. COMMENT: SDSM, trailing VMRO-DPMNE in recent polls by a wide margin, is likely to see its poll numbers dip even lower as a result of the failed motion, which many Macedonian citizens viewed as ill-timed -- coming on the eve of PM Gruevski's visit to Tirana to meet with President Bush on June 10. END COMMENT.

OPPOSITION: HIGH STAKES GAMBLE, LOW CHANCE OF SUCCESS

13. (C) SDSM President Sekerinska called the no-confidence vote after accusing Gruevski of engaging in unproductive

feuds with his coalition partners and of hampering judicial reforms. A senior SDSM adviser told us June 6 that the original plan had been to target either the Minister of Justice or the Minister of Defense for the no-confidence vote.

14. (C) According to the SDSM adviser, the party altered course after it assessed that it had support from an increasing number of MPs, including some government parliamentarians, for the more general no-confidence approach. The adviser told us that SDSM was ready to offer the Prime Minister portfolio to another party leader (reportedly Gruevski's coalition partner, NSDP President Petkovski) in exchange for support for the no-confidence motion. He added, however, that the party believed it had only a "50-50" chance of succeeding with the motion.

COALITION PARTNER THREATENS TO LEAVE COALITION...AGAIN

15. (C) In the meantime, over the weekend of June 2-3, DPA VP Thaci threatened to leave the coalition (for the second time in as many weeks), accusing Gruevski of having ceded DPA's eAlbanian legislative agenda to rival eAlbanian party DUI in an agreement concluded May 29 (reftel). In a meeting with the DCM June 2, Thaci said he would walk out of the coalition unless Gruevski agreed to a joint public statement announcing that the government would not implement some of the terms of the May agreement until after Macedonia received a NATO invitation. The DCM stressed to Thaci the importance of fulfilling the terms of the agreement. He noted that failure to do so also would undermine Macedonia's NATO candidacy.

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Thaci said he would consider those points and would respond later that week.

16. (C) In a June 4 meeting with PM Gruevski, the Ambassador reiterated the importance of honoring the terms of the agreement with DUI. Postponing implementation would amount to a breach of the May 29 agreement; that might serve DPA's partisan interests, but it would be harmful to the interests of the country. Gruevski complained that Thaci did not seem to be bluffing, but the Prime Minister seemed at a loss for a way out of the dilemma. Deputy PM Stavreski added that Thaci probably was willing to "commit political suicide" just to ensure DUI did not receive credit for implementing the terms of the May 29 agreement.

DPA RELENTS, COALITION HOLDS

17. (C) The Ambassador told Gruevski that we would again emphasize to DPA the importance of implementing the agreement with DUI in a timely fashion, a message the DCM delivered by telephone to Thaci on June 4 and in person June 5. In close coordination with us, the NATO and EUSR missions also communicated that message to Thaci. Faced with increasing international pressure, Thaci backed down. On June 6, the DPA VP and PM Gruevski met and announced that the coalition would continue and would focus on NATO-related reforms.

18. (C) Thaci then informed us June 7 that DPA would not obstruct the implementation of the agreement with DUI. He added that the party would in fact take part in working groups tasked with developing draft programs or legislation to address two of the agreement's points, provided SDSM also participated. The Prime Minister's Chief of Staff later confirmed that the GOM would move ahead with implementation of the agreement with DUI.

COMMENT

19. (C) Although both the no-confidence motion and Thaci's walkout threat failed, both were stinging rebukes and reminders to Gruevski that he cannot expect easy sailing if he fails to communicate more effectively within the coalition, as well as with the opposition. Although his government is secure for the moment, and Gruevski continues to enjoy high polls numbers among the Macedonian public, his 65 vote edge in the 120-seat parliament is less impressive than his advantage a month or two ago, when he could count on 73 votes for his government programs. Gruevski will have to adjust his leadership style if he expects to move ahead smartly to implement the reforms and other programs required to make Macedonia a competitive candidate for NATO membership.

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